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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the effort of South Dakota University's Affiliated Program/Center for Developmental Disabilities (SD UAP/CDD) to provide a comprehensive outreach-training approach for personnel serving in early intervention programs. Public Law 99-457 (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986) requires states and local agencies to provide adequate intervention services for special needs children, birth to age five, and their families. The need for personnel training was addressed by the SD UAP/CDD's project proposal. Components of the project include: (1) an experimental course in early intervention special education at the undergraduate level developed and implemented by the preservice training coordinator; (2) inservice training for educators currently working in early intervention programs provided through statewide video and audio networks, on-site course instruction, and learning packages developed for distance learning and coordinated by the outreach training coordinator; and (3) a three-day early childhood institute developed and implemented by the coordinators and various state agencies. Project evaluation will be completed in three phases: project input, project process, and project outcome. Desired outcomes include: (1) interagency and multidisciplinary cooperation; (2) improvement in services for the child and family; and (3) training for professionals working in early intervention. (KS)

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DEVELOPING A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD INSERVICE PERSONNEL PREPARATION: A RURAL APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

With the passage of Public Law 99-457 (Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986), states and local agencies have been faced with the challenge of providing adequate intervention services for special needs children birth through five and their families. Currently, in South Dakota, there is a shortage of trained personnel in family services for the handicapped to implement these services, and personnel currently serving these children usually have not been specifically prepared to work with this age group. Additionally, the rural nature of South Dakota provides little opportunity to work in an integrated early intervention capacity with professionals from other disciplines, particularly specialists located in urban areas. Finally, there are limited training opportunities for rural professionals because of their extreme distance from colleges and/or universities that offer such educational training.

This paper will provide an overview of South Dakota University's Affiliated Program/Center for Developmental Disabilities (SD UAP/CDD) effort to provide a comprehensive outreach training approach.

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This federal and state funded training project, currently operating in its first year of implementation, is designed to provide a maximum of 15 hours of undergraduate/graduate coursework in early childhood special education using a preservice/inservice system in order to meet the specific needs of personnel in rural and reservation areas.

BACKGROUND OF PROJECT

In 1986, Congress enacted a national program to expand and improve early intervention services through the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments (P.L.99-457). The handicapped infants and toddlers program created by this legislation is designed to help states provide family-centered support to infants and toddlers through individually designed early intervention services. While early intervention services has been a part of federal efforts to assist individuals in need for many years, the new handicapped infants and toddlers program challenges the nation to improve, expand, and coordinate those services so that the policy goal of statewide, comprehensive, coordinated programs of early services for all infants and toddlers with handicaps and their families can be achieved (Report to Congress,1988).

The development and implementation of a policy and plan for personnel preparation standards is one of the fourteen required components for states participating in P.L.99-457, Part H. Part H provides a lengthy and detailed description of the requisite policy components that relate to "the establishment and maintenance of standards to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out [early intervention services] are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained" (Holmes,1990). Many times, however, preparation of existing personnel has not included training in the application of their own specialty to young children with special needs, nor does it give them the multidisciplinary expertise necessary to meet the broad range of needs of these children and their families (Zeitlin,1982). This early intervention project will help assist the lead agency, the South Dakota Office of Special Education, to meet and to comply with the demands of this legislation.

NEED FOR PROJECT

Children and the families that support them are the future of our nation. We must assure that the youngest and most vulnerable of our children, those with special needs, have the fullest opportunity to develop the capacity to participate in all aspects of American society. P.L. 99-457 focuses national attention on the needs of families with infants and toddlers who experience or are at risk of having handicaps.

This legislation provides impetus and assistance to coordinate federal, state and local efforts on behalf of these young children and their families (Report to Congress,1988). Thus, the Federal Government has seen the need to provide specific and quality

training to the early interventionists in the field and to give them the necessary support to maintain these skills to meet the demands required of them.

Shortage of personnel/skills:
There is a tremendous need in South Dakota to provide community-based training at both the preservice/inservice levels in early intervention (Forest,1989). The rural nature of South Dakota creates a situation where many special education teachers find themselves to be the only "expert" within a school system. A survey conducted in 1989 with the State Department of Education found that the majority of these teachers have only an undergraduate degree and of those who have a masters degree, few have specific training in early childhood special education.

As indicated by research, some staff turnover rate among the professionals working in a rural service delivery program is often very high due to the extensive amount of travel, numerous responsibilities and the lack of close interpersonal relationships between staff members.

Delivery system:
There is no current outreach delivery system in South Dakota which specifically addresses the needs of early intervention providers identified in P.L. 99-457. Service gaps exist when some, but not all, needed early intervention services are available. For example, in the Schafft, et al. (1987) study, state agency staff, local community service providers, and parents reported service gaps in the areas of pediatric speech and audiology, pediatric physical therapy, and respite care. Delivery system gaps also exist when services are available only through agencies with limited capacity to meet all early intervention service needs.

Another delivery system gap resulted when early intervention services were available only in a single setting, such as a hospital.

This instructional design will provide a distance learning delivery system that is flexible enough to accommodate staff changes and needs while maintaining a quality level of skill development and content maintenance for professionals in the field.

Rural nature of system:
In South Dakota,68% of the public school early childhood special education programs and services are run by single districts. Well over half (57%) are situated in rural areas with populations of less than 2,500 people. Nearly 12.3% are located in small towns with populations from 2500 up to 10,000 people. Only 14% reside in communities of 10,000 - 50,000 and 17% reside in cities with over 50,000 people (Forest,1989). In many cases, families requiring home based services have been unable to obtain needed assistance in early intervention services due to their geographic isolation. Additional factors include the previously described statewide lack of trained personnel as well as difficulty in obtaining transportation to distant service providers.

The geographical isolation of individuals, limited local resources, meager health care facilities, and difficulty accessing sufficient training arrangements are key issues that will be addressed, evaluated, and monitored continuously throughout this entire project. This outreach project is designed to provide training to community personnel in key direct service areas so that they may provide pertinent care for the children and their families. This project is unique because it is developed for personnel who are geographically isolated in rural They have often grown up, are employed, and are raising or have raised families in these rural areas, and have a strong desire to remain in the area. Educating these individuals as close to their homes and communities as possible fills professional needs while meeting the overall goal of this project: to improve educational services of special needs children and their families/communities and while improving educational standards of personnel in rural areas.

DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT

P.L.99-457 has created extreme pressure in South Dakota to respond to the legislative mandate that personnel working in early intervention be appropriately and adequately prepared and trained (Federal Register,1989). This project is one of South Dakota's response to this sense of urgency. Training efforts must address not only complex skills and behaviors associated with new roles, but also the challenge to fundamental beliefs about the intervention process. In addition, the law has mandated that training be conducted on an interdisciplinary basis, which means that coordination and consistency across disciplines is essential. Efforts are further complicated by state and local translations of how the law will be implemented (Winton,1990).

In South Dakota, this need was addressed through a RFP from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities and the proposal was written by the SD UAP/CDD to assist the lead agency in fulfilling the diverse training needs throughout the state. In August of 1989 a survey entitled "Early Childhood Special Education Programs and Services in South Dakota" was completed and the survey's executive summary report was instrumental in conveying current statistics on the need for inservice training to the attention of the Office of Special Education. The survey was distributed to 138 educator's and 109 administrator's directly involved in public school early childhood special education programs and services in South Dakota.

The results were startling (Forest,1989).

1) 57% of the programs and services are situated in rural areas with populations of less than 2,500 people
2) 35% reported an increase during the past two years in the number of special needs children birth through two years of age
3) 67% of the educator respondents reported that they were isolated in their program
4) 43% of the educators have majored in a combination of elementary and special education while only 1% of the

educators majored in early childhood special education

5) 69% of the administrators of public school early childhood special education programs have no coursework in early childhood special education
6) 62% of the educators have had little or no inservice training in the last several years in the area of early childhood special education and
7) 96% of the educators want further educational experiences related to working with children with special needs.

Results clearly indicated the extreme need for inservice training among early childhood special education educators and administrators within the state to enable them to better plan for and work with special needs children and their families.

This outreach training project will provide a statewide and community-based, coordinated personnel development program in early intervention. Preservice/inservice training opportunities will be provided for educators in rural areas. This approach will be twofold: first, to create a training system through various distance learning techniques and innovative technological methods; and second, to produce comprehensive and culturally sensitive materials that could be integrated into future training activities with possible distribution throughout the nation. General knowledge and skills will be acquired in working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers with special needs and their families while cultural concerns relevant to working with Native American children and their families will be included.

KEY FEATURES

Key features of the project, based upon an analysis of needs, include:

1) A Regional Approach - the project has adopted a regional approach to management by networking with seven locations
2) A Distance Learning Approach - this project will meet the needs of the rural and reservation areas by taking the coursework and activities directly to them through a variety of delivery methods
3) Short-term Needs - a component of the training project is to train personnel in existing programs
4) Long-term Needs - strategies are being designed to incorporate coursework into the educational curriculum so that students who begin their training in the near future will graduate with the skills necessary to serve children with special needs according to what is best for the family
5) Cooperative Approach - the training model implements coordinated linkages between urban and rural professionals in order to best meet the needs of the family and the individual child
6) Focus on the Family - the involvement of parents in all areas of the project reflects the family focus called for

in Public Law 99-457 and acknowledges the long-term benefits of early intervention services for both the child's development and the overall strength of the family

7) Cultural Sensitivity - the curriculum of the project will be culturally sensitive to the Native American and

8) Replicability - the training model could be easily replicated by others using the procedures and staff development outlined in the proposal.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The key staff for this outreach training project will be placed in the School of Education and the SD UAP/CDD to demonstrate and enhance the interdisciplinary philosophy of this training and to provide academic credit for all training offered.

During the first year of this three year project,the preservice training coordinator has developed and implemented an experimental course in early intervention special education at the undergraduate level. She will continue to work with existing faculty at the School of Education and the SD UAP/CDD to develop and teach the needed coursework which would enable participants from this project to acquire an endorsement in early childhood special education.

The outreach training coordinator is housed at the SD UAP/CDD and is responsible for the development and dissemination of inservice training appropriate for those educators who are already working in early intervention programs. At least nine hours of undergraduate/ graduate level coursework will be developed and delivered in cooperation with the University of South Dakota State Wide Educational Services, through statewide video and audio networks, on-site course instruction, and learning packages developed for distance learning. Participants will be able to make direct contact as needed through a toll-free telephone number and in-person visits by the coordinator to each of the seven regional training sites will occur during each of the courses. In year two, the telecourse network will be utilized to connect this coursework to rural community colleges/universities which will enable those professionals from those areas to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills.

During the third year of this project, the preservice training coordinator, the outreach training coordinator, and the project director will work with the School of Education, the School of Medicine, the SD UAP/CDD, the State Wide Education Services as well as the State Department of Education, Office of Special Education to develop and implement a three-day early childhood institute.

Further efforts will continue with the University of South Dakota State Wide Education Services to offer distance learning coursework on a regular basis to rural areas. Successful completion of this outreach initiative will help provide the personnel needed for effective early intervention programs throughout the state. It will

further enable numerous disciplines to work cooperatively and 2competently to develop and to implement a model training program using telecommunication and distance learning that may be replicable to other rural areas. The outreach procedure is initially being offered to participants from broadly defined early intervention service areas. This audience generally includes representatives from a variety of disciplines as well as from various state and local agencies.

A later alternative approach to acquire the necessary audience for this training will be to carefully plan who should be included rather than leaving this to chance. Thus, the future strategy for selecting the necessary participants is to target specific "organizational families" (Havelock,Havelock,1973) (eg, administrators, direct service providers, families) or those individuals who have direct impact on one another back in their work place. Evidence suggests that it is difficult for individuals to develop new roles and behaviors unless organizations are trained together. By participating together in training, it is more likely that the individuals within organizations will develop a shared knowledge and value base (Draper,Lang,1985 and Georgiades, Phillimore,1975).

The emphasis of P.L.99-457 on interagency, multidisciplinary, and professional-family collaboration means that a variety of individuals will be working together who may not share the same knowledge and value base. They may have different ideas about their own and other's roles in early intervention. Definitions of concepts such as "family focus" may vary considerably across disciplines and across or within teams. Thus, the importance of targeting is particularly relevant to the success of this project. A final significant component is the development of networks and linkages by collaborating with other colleges/universities concerned with the quality of available early intervention personnel preparation programs.

Through this collaboration two specific goals will be reached: (a) to prepare competent early intervention personnel from various disciplines who will fulfill leadership roles in developing, delivering, and evaluating needed services for young children with handicaps and their families, and (b) to prepare personnel will be able to respond to the needs of young children with handicaps and their families in relation to the unique geographic characteristics of rural South Dakota.

PROGRESS TO DATE

1) Outreach rationale - distance learning techniques and technological methods can be highlighted with both visual effects and narrations and outreach workshops provide hands on and practical experiences necessary to meet the core competencies. Another consideration underlying this system of training is that high-quality programs can engage the interest of caregivers and present positive role models to them.

2) Review of options - finding out precisely what kind of media equipment/systems are currently available throughout the state and the possibility of using this equipment/system for the outreach training project.
3) Diverse training options - options will include a 1-week training institute for course credit, a series of weekend training workshops,specialized seminars and conferences, audio-visual distance learning technologies and opportunities for individualized study and research.
4) Linkages - a continuing step of this project will involve the linking and coordinating of instructional and field-based experiences for early interventionists with state and community agencies, service providers, parent organizations, and the state's interagency coordinating council. Such collaboration is intended to ensure that training competencies reflect the needs of service providers and consumers in the state. These links will also facilitate the development of field-based experiences within appropriate settings and promote future employment opportunities.

EVALUATION OF PROJECT

The evaluation of this outreach training project is composed of three phases: project input, project process, and project outcome. Both formative and summative data will be collected to provide information necessary to make evaluate judgements of project effectiveness. During the first two years of this project implementations, input evaluations will examine the congruences of project goals with the theoretical intent of the project. Process evaluation will monitor accomplishments of project objectives as they relate to project goals. Results of the process evaluations will form the basis for ongoing project modifications and improvements. In the third year of operation, emphasis will be shifted to outcome evaluations. These outcome evaluations will assess whether or not early interventionists have meet the designated competencies and terminal goals, the impact of the outreach training on university and service systems, and the cost-effectiveness of the project.

DESIRED PROJECT OUTCOMES

A project of this nature would require the establishment of liaisons with a large number of state and local agencies. To this end the SD UAP/CDD's network of national chapters and state and local agencies will allow for maximum cooperation and coordination between disciplines, permitting a careful matching of national resources to guarantee state and local needs. This relationship would also guarantee a high degree of visibility and commitment required by such a comprehensive effort. In addition, close working relationships would be maintained with other state, local, and national associations. These would include representatives from many disciplines providing a broad range of related services; parent and professional advocacy organizations; and special

education groups.

From the outset the project involved has individuals from a variety of different disciplines. Moreover, this project has created numerous opportunities to form additional liaisons between agencies and educators. A benefit to these state and local agencies for their involvement would be to enhance their abilities to develop and implement state-of-the-art programs and services for this population.

The benefits to the child and his family from such a comprehensive training approach would be seen in appropriate and consistent services being provided and delivered to the child and his family to meet their individual needs through early interventionists who have specific skills and competencies in the field of early intervention special education.

Through the seven regional sites an estimated 70 to 100 early interventionist will receive training in these specific skills and competencies enabling the professionals to receive an endorsement in early childhood special education.

The development, implementation, and evaluation of this training project will clearly reflect the most comprehensive and collaborative networking between numerous disciplines who play a vital role in effectively serving handicapped children and their families.

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